



EMPOWERMENT OF SECONDARY SCHOOL GIRLS - A STUDY

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ABSTRACT

Women empowerment is one of the most important issues for all nations of the world. It is significant not only from personal point of view but from the national development perspective too. It means powering or giving authority to women for developing strength and confidence in the field of social, political, educational, economic and other fields of life and prevents them from all forms of discrimination and violence against them.

Adolescence is the grounding stage of adulthood which is very much crucial and vulnerable period of one's life. The prevailing gender discrimination in human society put our adolescent girls at risk for their secure and healthy transition from childhood to adulthood. Empowering adolescent girls through education, life skills training, social support and awareness can help a lot to build up self-assurance and strength among them. Therefore, it is necessary to make them more sensitive about their righteous activities and intrinsic power through empowerment. This paper attempts to highlight the empowerment status of women in general and adolescent girls in particular with special reference to Nagaon sub-division area.

KEY WORDS: Women Empowerment, Adolescent girls, Awareness.

INTRODUCTION:

The development of a nation largely depends on the development of its individuals. If men and women are equally treated and opportunities are given proportionately, the possibility of complete development of the society and the nation increases. Therefore, development in its real sense requires gender equality which is lacking almost all societies of the world in general and India in particular. Gender inequality in Indian context is more evident in economic, political and social variables. In the economic field women still lagging behind than men and they are more likely to live in poverty, less likely to participate for work in the formal sector and major household responsibilities. In the political zone women have been seen lower representation in electoral bodies of any level. Similarly in social sector too huge inequality has been observed in the form of sex ratio, decision making, literacy rate, spirit of mobility and enrolment in higher education. Women are more likely to be the victims of domestic violence and sexual assault in the society (Singh, 2015). In India women have been given the secondary status in the household and work place which significantly affect women's health, status, education and political involvement. Women are commonly married young, quickly become mothers and then burdened by stringent domestic and financial responsibilities. It has been rightly observed that male domination in different societies still continues and all activities done keeping the benefits in front favouring men. Moreover, almost in all Indian communities, discrimination prevails between boy child and girl child and birth of a baby boy is celebrated with pride which is hardly noticed in case of baby girl. In some societies, the birth of a baby girl is considered to be a curse as a result of which crime against female foeticide and infanticide committed (Agarwal, 2012). Such kind of incidents take place not only in uneducated and poor sections of the society but educated and well to do families too in a large scale. More over least care is taken to the girl child due to which they suffer varied forms of illness because of malnutrition. Though many efforts have been endeavoured by the nations of the world to bring gender equality in all aspects, the result is still frustrating. The United Nations Organization (UNO) too has set some targets for all its member nations to achieve by the end of 2015 in the name of Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) among which gender equality and women empowerment is the most prominent one.

Women Empowerment: Concept and Importance:

Empowerment is a process of enabling people to do their activities independently in different areas of life. Simply it means powering or enforcing people. It refers individuals acquiring the power to think and act freely, exercise choice and fulfill their potential as full and equal members of society (Lakshmi & Iyer, 2015). It is a multilevel construct referring to individuals, organizations and community. It cannot be restricted to a particular aspect rather it is many dimensions. So, empowerment is a multi dimensional process, which should enable individuals or a group of individuals to realize their full identity and powers in all spheres of life (Nath & Anupama, 2008). Empowerment cannot be restricted to the boundaries of a particular nation rather it is an international and global issue. Being international it is involving mutual respect, critical reflection, caring and group participation, through which people lacking an equal share of valued resources, gain greater access to and control over these resources (Lakshmi & Iyer, 2015).

Women empowerment has become a global issue now. This concept was first introduced at the international conference held in 1985 at Nairobi. Women empowerment refers to upliftment of women status in the field of social, political, educational, economic and other fields of life. It can also be said as the redistribution of social power and control of resources in favour of women. It prevents them from all forms of discrimination or violence against them. Women empowerment involves the building up of a society, a political environment, wherein women can breathe without the fear of oppression, exploitation, apprehension, discrimination and the general feeling of persecution which goes with being a woman in a traditionally male dominated structure (Shettar, 2015).

The UNO has taken some initiatives to bring gender equality highlighting the issues of women. Accordingly the year 1975 and the decade 1976-85 have been observed as 'International year for women' and 'International decade for women' respectively. In the same way, 11th October is being observed as 'International day for girl child' each year. The main theme of this day in the year 2014 was 'Empowering Adolescent Girls: Ending the Cycle of Violence'.

Though equality is an issue of top priority, women still tends to be dependent on their male counterparts on any issues including the household activities. They are hardly going out without having permission from in laws and others. We have also seen a section of women in our society who are completely dependent on their husbands or else even in some purely own affairs. These incidents signify how much dependent our women on their male counterparts. These observations highly signify the importance the empowerment of women.

Empowerment of Adolescent Girls:

Adolescence is a very crucial period of life which represents a stage of intensive growth and change in almost all aspects of child's physical, mental, social, spiritual, aesthetic and emotional life. There is no universally accepted definition regarding the period included in adolescence. Ordinarily, the period from 12/13 years to 18/19 years is called adolescence stage. But the UNO has considered the period from 10 years to 19 years as adolescence period. The growth achieved, the experiences gained, responsibilities felt and the relationships developed at this stage destine the complete future of an individual (Nath & Anupama, 2008). Adolescent girls are our potential mothers and future homemakers. It comprises nearly half of the growing period of human life. According to WHO adolescence is a period of life where a series of varied, rapid and extensive change occurs. It is a crucial phase to catch up growth in the life cycle of girls after infancy.

The world population is almost homogeneous as half of this is women. In India women constitute 48.26% of the total population as per 2011 census report. Similarly 253.2 million people (19.6%) of India are adolescent of which more than 119 million are girls. Thus almost every 5th person in India is an adolescent. India has more adolescents than never before and more than in any other country. In spite of having huge potential workforce, the future of adolescent girls seems dismal with various problems i.e. underweight, child marriage, maternal mortality etc. According to UNICEF more than half of adolescent girls (56%) are anaemic and 43% are married off before the age of 18. Malnourishment among India's adolescent population is found to be higher than even some of the least developed countries of the world. Therefore, it is urgently required to make them aware

about their problems and appropriate remedies. As future of the nation is hide in adolescent girls in a large extent so it is necessary to make them prepare for all responsibilities in and outside the household through education and empowerment. So the nation should plan and execute adequate policies to prepare this large young workforce for productive purposes from national development perspectives.

Rationale of the study:

Adolescence is the preparation of adulthood which is very crucial period of life. It is a period of rapid growth with new capacities and physical changes that create not only opportunity for their progress but also problems as well. So it is necessary to prepare them for variety of roles in all spheres of life. Empowerment can give them a chance to perform their assigned roles in different stages of life effectively. Therefore we need to make them prepare in such a way that they can be able to protect themselves against any form of violence and discrimination. As today's adolescent girls are tomorrow's women and potential mothers so we need to make them more empowered. Keeping this consideration in mind the present study was undertaken.

OBJECTIVES OF THE STUDY:

- To study the awareness status of empowerment of adolescent girls.
- To study the empowerment status of tribal and Non-tribal adolescent girls.
- To study the decision making capability of tribal and Non-tribal adolescent girls.

METHODOLOGY OF THE STUDY:

Sample:

A sample of 217 adolescent girls from class XII was selected randomly from 50 different educational institutions of Nagaon sub-division area among which 98 tribal and remaining 119 were from non tribal community.

Research tool:

The tool used in this study was 'Adolescence Girls Empowerment Scale' prepared by Dr. Devendra Singh Sisodia and Dr. Alpna Singh. The questionnaire has 49 statements from seven different areas altogether with reliability coefficient of 0.71 (Test- Retest Method) and high content and construct validity.

Data collection:

Descriptive survey method was applied in this study to collect data. Sampled students were personally approached and asked them to fill the questionnaire as per the guidelines given therewith.

RESULT AND DISCUSSION:

The result of the present study is expressed as follows:

Table 1: Empowerment status of adolescent Girls

Category	N	Level of empowerment (%)		
		Low	Average	High
Overall	217	0	38.46	61.54
Tribal	98	0	37.50	62.50
Non-Tribal	119	0	65.22	34.78

From the above table it has been revealed that most of the adolescent girls have high awareness status on empowerment. Here 61.54% adolescent girls have found to be placed in high empowerment status where as 38.46% in average category. No records have been observed in the category of low awareness status on empowerment. In case of tribal adolescent girls, 62.50% have exposed high empowerment status where as 37.50% have average. On the other hand 34.78% non-tribal girls have shown high empowerment status comparing to 65.22% average status.

Table 2: Significance of difference on empowerment between tribal and Non-tribal adolescent girls

Category	N	M	SD	Z	Sig. (2 tailed)	Remark
Tribal	98	199.88	20.51	3.93	2.58	S
Non-Tribal	119	186.13	15.54			

Significant level is at $P > 0.01$

The 'Z' value while comparing the significance of difference of empowerment status between tribal and non-tribal adolescent girls is found 3.93 ($Z = 3.93 > .01$), which is greater than the standard value of 2.58 at 1% level of significance. So the calculated value is significant at 1% level of significance and therefore, rejects the null hypothesis. It indicates that there is significant difference on empowerment status of tribal and non-tribal adolescent girls. Therefore, it can be said that differences exist on empowerment status between tribal and non-tribal adolescent girls and hence it varies from community to community.

Table 3: Significance of difference on decision making capability between tribal and Non-tribal adolescent girls

Category	N	M	SD	Z	Sig. (2 tailed)	Remark
Tribal	98	28.06	3.77	0.30	1.96	NS
Non-Tribal	119	27.83	4.54			

Significant level is at $P < 0.05$

The 'Z' value while comparing the significance of difference on decision making capability between tribal and non-tribal adolescent girls is found 0.30 ($Z = 0.30 < .05$), which is lower than the standard value of 1.96 at 5% level of significance. So the calculated value is not significant at 5% level of significance and therefore, null hypothesis cannot be rejected. It indicates that there is no significant difference on decision making capability which is one of the most important ingredients of empowerment between tribal and non-tribal adolescent girls. Therefore, it can be said that no difference exist on decision making capability between tribal and non-tribal adolescent girls.

MAJOR FINDINGS:

- Most of the adolescent girls in general and tribal adolescent girls in particular have high empowerment status.
- Most of the Non-tribal adolescent girls have average empowerment status.
- Tribal adolescent girls have high empowerment status than non-tribal adolescent girls.
- The average mean score on empowerment of adolescent girls is 197.33.
- The Mean empowerment status of tribal adolescent girls is higher (199.88) than non-tribal (186.13) adolescent girls.
- Significant difference exists on empowerment status between tribal and non-tribal adolescent girls.
- No significant difference exists on decision making capability between tribal and non-tribal adolescent girls.

CONCLUSION:

Women empowerment is a much debatable topic of the present era around the world. This issue has been gradually raising its popularity day by day. It is not because of emerging feminism in the society, but for long standing exploitation and dominance on women over the years. As almost half of the world population is women, so it is necessary to make them aware, developed, educated and empowered. Adolescence is the most promising stage of one's life and today's adolescent girls are tomorrow's potential women and mothers, so it is very important to make them empowered in all spheres of life from gender equality perspective as well enhancing the possibility of progressive development of the nation. To conclude Empowered girls empowered nation.

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